

Brewer, Howard
interviewed by Nathan Anthony on
January 22, 1988

Eastham Historical Society-Oral Histories

1 audiocassette (ca. 90 min.)+transcript

Brewer, Howard
Chase, Ralph
Turnip Farming--Eastham, MA
Cape Cod in the 1930's
Nauset Rd., Eastham (MA) neighborhood

Interview with Howard Brewer
by Nathan Anthony
in Eastham, Massachusetts
January 22, 1988

Nathan: This is an interview with Howard Brewer January 22, 1988.
It is taking place in Eastham, Massachusetts for the Oral History
Project of the Eastham Historical Society. The interviewer is
Nathan Anthony. We are in Howard and Marian Brewer's house on
Nauset Road.

First of all, Howard, when and where were you born?

Howard: I was born right here in the town of Eastham, down in
North Eastham, in my grandmother's house. My grandfaher was dead
before I was born and my mother and father lived there and that's
where I was born.

Nathan: Where was the house?

Howard: That was right out on Route 6, where Nauset Road comes
out on Route 6 at North Eastham. My father built a house right
here on Nauset Road, right across the street from you, which is
where Joyce Johnson lives now. He built that house from scratch.
He was a carpenter then.

Nathan: When was that built?

Howard: Well, that was built probably, I would say 1926 and '27, and he moved into it just prior to the stock market crash and of course he lost the house. And I guess in those days the stock market affected everyone and they just simply lost about everything they had.

Of course he was jobless during the Depression in the thirties. Or he'd work for a while and then he'd be out of work. I often think-- because during the Depression my brother and I, we thought it was great fun, but it must have been so tough for our parents. He'd go and he'd scratch quahogs and dig clams and get some scallops, and my mother'd try to peddle them from door to door to people who were just as poor as we were, you know.

But I'll say one thing about the Depression, we certainly ate very well, which is an amazing thing. Probably ate better then than we do now.

But after we lost the house on Nauset Road, which was probably in the very early thirties, we moved over to Great Pond Road on the other side of town. We lived there for one summer in a cottage, then moved to the house next door that had some sort of heat in it, I think coal stoves and so forth, and we were there in the winter. For several years we bounced back and forth between the cottage and the house. Then my father was able to buy the cottage and being a carpenter he renovated the cottage and made it a year round home.

Nathan: When was that?

Howard: Well, he probably made that into a year round home I would say about 1935. I must have been at that time about nine years old. And I lived there all the time growing up, going through school, until I myself was in the Navy and never went back home again.

Nathan: When did you join the Navy, Howard?

Howard: I enlisted at seventeen, after I graduated from high school. I certainly had the approval of my mother, but it surprised me. And off I went in the Navy at that time. Of course it was 1943. I guess one man's war is another man's vacation. By the time I ever got to sailing in the Atlantic, the North Atlantic, why, my older brothers had cleared the Atlantic of all the U-boats, so I personally didn't see much action.

But I can remember growing up around here. My cousin lived at Ralph Chase's house and I used to bounce back and forth from Great Pond Road to Nauset Road and play with him. Later on I worked for Ralph in the summers. Ralph was a big farmer at the time.

Nathan: This was before the war?

Howard: Yes. Right now we're talking about before the war.

Nathan: Did you go to school up here?

Howard: Oh, yes. I hit all three wings. The museum, of course, as you know, is only the south wing of the school. They had an east wing, they had a west wing, with the auditorium in the middle. The first and second grade were in the east wing, and I can remember Miss Keith was our teacher. Being a six-year-old, I thought she was ancient. She might have been all of forty, I don't know. She was a fixture in the Eastham school system, I know that.

Then the third, fourth and fifth grades were in the west wing and they were taught by Mrs. Clayton Horton, Virginia Horton. And then I moved into the south wing and Otto Nickerson, my uncle, taught there. I stayed there through part of the sixth grade, when we moved into the new elementary school, which is where the school is right now. And we marched up there, I think, in the month of January with our books under our arms.

Nathan: Did you say your uncle was one of your teachers?

Howard: Yes. Otto Nickerson.

Nathan: What did he teach?

Howard: He taught the sixth, seventh and eighth grades and he

was the principal of the school. For years. He retired. I think he worked all the way up until 1962 before he retired.

So I finished out the sixth grade in the new elementary school, up on the little hill where it is now, on Schoolhouse Road, the seventh grade and the eighth grade. And the high school at that time was in Orleans. Ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth. And I went to Orleans High School, the ninth grade in Orleans High School, and once again halfway through the year, why, they finished the new school, which is now the Middle School up on the hill on Route 28. So in the middle of the winter some time--and I think this was in January also--off we went from one school to the other. That old high school used to sit just about where Legion Hall is now in Orleans. That was either a two or three-story building. It was quite high. But it was ancient, dilapidated. When I finished out high school, I enlisted in the Navy.

But anyway-- do you want to hear some more about Nauset Road?

Nathan: Sure.

Howard: As I remember it?

Nathan: Yes, absolutely.

Howard: Well, when I was young I was friendly with my cousin Bob Brewer, who lived with Ralph Chase, and my grandmother-- Ralph

lived with his father. He was never married, you know, till he was eighty-one.

Nathan: Oh, really? No, I didn't know that.

Howard: You didn't know that? He was married at eighty-one for the first time. He married Toku.

Nathan: Everybody knows her, I guess.

Howard: Let's see, Ralph's father married my grandmother. He married my father's mother. My father's father died soon after he was born. My father was born in 1901. He may have died in 1904, something like that. So she was a widow and she later on married Ralph's father. Ralph came along with the deal, I guess, so he always lived there, and Ralph lived there until he died.

Nathan: When did he die?

Howard: When did Ralph die? Eight years ago maybe? He lived to be quite elderly. He was ninety-three when he died. He was a lot older than Toku.

But anyway, I used to go over there and play around. Ralph had lots of fields that he cultivated, one of them being you know where all the houses are on Seaward Way? They were all fields and they were all garden. Down in the hollow where the Lloyds live, he raised carrots down there. And to the west of

your house he raised turnips and raspberries, and around his old homestead--which, by the way, is the oldest house in the town of Eastham, you know that--

Nathan: I didn't know that.

Howard: You didn't? That house was built-- well, they had a plaque out in front at one time. I think it was built about 1735, something like that. It's an old house. And I don't know but what the old Collins homestead up beyond you is the second oldest house in town.

But anyway, Ralph being a farmer in the twenties and the thirties and the very early forties, he cultivated the land all around his house there. He had asparagus. He was a big asparagus farmer. Of course that was very popular in the late twenties and thirties on the Cape. They used to bunch the asparagus right there on the farms. His farm and other farms. Then they'd crate it and ship it off by truck to-- I don't really know, like to Brockton and Boston.

I remember Ralph's brother, Leslie Chase, he was a trucker. He had several large trucks and he used to carry the asparagus in every day. But he also cultivated turnips over by the ocean side. You know where the dirt road is that goes in by Duck Pond, right by Jack Curtis's?

Nathan: Is that the fire road?

Howard: The fire road, yes. That goes in and that goes all the way to the ocean. And I don't know but today you can drive a car through there, all the way to the ocean. You walk down Ocean View Drive all the time. You know where Norman's house is.

Nathan: I think so. Which one is that?

Howard: You're going from north to south, it's on the right about halfway, back in the woods. There's a sign there.

Nathan: Which house is it again? There's a Devlin house there.

Howard: Devlin. I'm sorry, Devlin.

Nathan: I know where that is.

Howard: That was all field and Ralph Chase cultivated that. About eight acres of turnips. And of course there wasn't any Ocean View Drive then, so they'd get there by going down that dirt road by Duck Pond.

Nathan: There was no road going down that way at all then?

Howard: No, you had to go in and out by turning left and going down by Duck Pond and going through the woods there. That's a nice walk. You should walk through there some time.

Nathan: I have walked down part way, but I've never gone all the way through. Did you see many animals when you were a kid? Like deer and all that?

Howard: We used to see deer down by Addin Gill's house, which is on Queen Anne, behind where Collis Peters used to live. Collis sold his house recently.

Nathan: Again you'll have to tell me where, because I'm not sure.

Howard: It's the first house on the right going north. Well, actually it's the second house on the right going north now beyond Cable Road. That used to be a farmhouse too. In fact my uncle owned that at one time, my father's brother. He died very young of cancer, but he farmed there. All around the house and the fields there and across the street.

You used to see a lot of deer in that neighborhood, but of course, we didn't have the trees then that we have now. There were trees, but mostly-- well, it's amazing the amount of open land they had around here. Of course the golf course was virtually all open, the eighteen hole golf course, from Cedar Bank to Salt Pond. But right across the street from our house right here were all fields. Even the locust grove right across the street, that was fields and cultivated land. I think at that time it was cultivated by the Sparrow family. And up behind Jack Curtis's on what remains of Little Creek Road, that was

cultivated.

Just amazing the open space we had. It's only since about 1955 that the trees have really grown like crazy around here. We have more people, but ironically we have more trees than ever. And of course you've probably read, I guess when the Pilgrims landed on Cape Cod, Cape Cod was covered with beautiful woods.

Nathan: I have read that. There was a time when there weren't a lot of trees. I remember reading Thoreau's book, that there were wheat fields between here and Orleans.

Howard: I guess the settlers cut them all down. For homes and ships and everything else. Then the topsoil blew off.

Nathan: Do you remember any shipwrecks that took place when you were around?

Howard: I don't remember them specifically, no. There were shipwrecks, I'm sure, but we never got down to the shore. It was more difficult then to get down to the shore, especially to get along the shore. You had to walk or go by horse and wagon on the shore in that day and age. But I don't remember any shipwrecks. Not when I was a kid, specifically.

Nathan: How about bad storms? Were there any bad storms?

Howard: Well, I suppose there were, but none that I remember

specifically. Of course when you're three feet tall any snow is a deep snowstorm, right?

You might be interested in this too. The Roach Company, which has the plant in North Eastham? Before they had the plant in North Eastham they had a sand hole right at the corner of Nauset Road and Schoolhouse Road, and you can see it to this day. You can see the remnants of that pit. If you look when you walk by, you'll see it. You know where Helen ^{Progers} Bower lives?

Nathan: Yes.

Howard: Marion and I built that house. We built that house and we lived there-- gosh, I guess we lived there about twenty years. Then we sold that house and Helen ^r Bower bought it and we moved here. But anyway, when we built that house that sand pit was still open and that was 1953. A lot of little trees have grown. I thin them out and they get larger, but the remnants of the sand pit are still there. And also, you know, Progners are right next door to you. Their house sits in a small sand pit too and you can see the remnants of that. You look around the house and the landscaping and you'll see where the sand pit was. They took sand out of there and used it for the building of the town roads. I guess they would spread this hot liquid tar and cover it with a thin layer of sand.

Q: When was the Progner house built?

Howard: Progner's? That's a fairly modern house. Not too many years ago. I'm going to have to guess at this. About fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years ago. This house here that we're living in was built in 1963.

Q: How long were you in the Navy, Howard?

Howard: I was in the Navy two and a half years. I can remember when I was a small boy-- I can even remember how old I was, six years old-- the fleet came into Provincetown and everyone in eastern Massachusetts I guess rushed to Provincetown to visit the fleet. They had a few destroyers down there and they had a lot of heavy cruisers, and two of the heavy cruisers that were anchored in the harbor were the CHICAGO and the INDIANAPOLIS. At that time all the heavy cruisers were named after cities. And I can remember my father and mother taking me out to those two ships and I toured the ships. And then they'd come back from the boats to the town pier. It must have been a bad omen, I don't know, because the Japanese sunk them both in World War II.

From that point, from visiting those ships, I always wanted to be in the Navy. I don't think I was in the Navy twenty-four hours and I couldn't wait to get out. [Laughter] Anyway, I went through the Navy. Went to Sampson in New York in late 1943, 1944, and promptly got pneumonia. Spent three weeks in the hospital. Then I finished the boot camp and got everything I wanted in the Navy. Went to signal school. I asked to go to signal school, went to signal school, asked to get in the armed

guard, which was nothing more than Navy men sailing on merchant ships. The armed guard had a gunnery officer, a communications officer, and it had about-- most merchant ships would carry about twenty gunners. And they carried three radiomen and three signalmen. But anyway, it was good duty. Of course we had to go across the ocean in a convoy.

Nathan: This was the Atlantic?

Howard: Yes, strictly the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. And luckily I didn't see any action. We had a couple of air raids and the ship in front of us hit a mine, but did not sink. But my war didn't amount to much, thank God.

Nathan: Did you give any thought to staying in the Navy?

Howard: Well, I didn't really like the Navy. I did give some thought. Well, let's see, I enlisted at about seventeen and a half, so I was out of the Navy just prior to my twentieth birthday. To tell you the truth, Nathan, I didn't think I'd ever be thirty-seven years old. [Laughter] That's probably why I didn't stay. But things always work out for the best. So I got out of the Navy and went to college under the GI Bill. Met Marion in college.

Nathan: Where was that? What college?

Howard: I went to the University of Massachusetts. And I met Marion up there and we were married soon after I graduated. Marion never did graduate. She married me, so-- I'm not sure whether that's a good move or not. Perhaps she should have finished her college education, but anyway we settled right here in Eastham when we were first married. Rented several places before we built our home. I got a job as a plumber's helper. Times were tough in 1950. I got a job as a plumber's helper, and then I had a chance to go to work for the phone company, so I jumped at the chance and I've been working for the phone company ever since and I'm going to retire in seven weeks.

Nathan: When you came back after the war, did you see much of a change? Did it seem different?

Howard: No, it didn't. See, I was only gone two and a half years and I had several leaves, where I did come home for a short time. So I didn't find it so much of a change. Actually I've lived here all my life and I don't expect to move away.

I don't know if there's anything else I can tell you about Nauset Road or not. Oh, Ralph raised chickens, did I tell you that?

Nathan: No, you did not.

Howard: All that land behind where the Cooks live now, that is all Ralph Chase's land. He owned many, many acres. I don't

know, he probably owned forty acres on your side of the road, which is the west side of Nauset Road.

Nathan: Where did he get his money? How did he happen to own it all?

Howard: His father owned it. His father married my grandmother and she and her husband had the farm. So Ralph's father married into the farm. He carried on the tradition. And Ralph carried on the tradition also. But Ralph raised chickens down there behind where Nate Cook's house is now, and the chicken coops were down on the far west side of his land and also they were backed up to what is now Brackett Road. He raised many chickens there and he used to incubate the eggs. I can remember that. And the building still stands and the old incubator, believe it or not, is still in the cellar of that building, and I think there's something like four thousand, three hundred eggs that he could incubate at once. If I remember correctly. I think the temperature had to be kept very constant, a hundred and two or a hundred and four degrees.

But that was a big business of his too. So he raised asparagus, carrots and turnips. The asparagus sort of gave way to the turnips. The turnips followed the asparagus. And he also had raspberries. He had strawberries. I remember when I was a teenager picking strawberries. Gosh, I didn't like that job.

Nathan: Did you get paid for it?

Howard: Oh, sure. Oh, sure, he was very good. Ralph was very good to work for, because he'd pay more than anyone else. He'd pay like forty cents an hour and that was good pay back in 1940. It was probably a nickel more an hour than some of the workmen were getting.

So he was quite a farmer, quite a man. He himself was a Selectman at one time. Downstairs I have a series of fairly old town reports. I think they go back to 1928. And they're interesting to read.

Nathan: Did you ever hold town office yourself?

Howard: I was on the Recreation Commission for five or six years when I was young. The original Recreation Commission with the original members, and it's grown a lot since then. Had a lot of fun on that too. We were responsible for the first tennis court in town, I can remember that.

Nathan: Where was that?

Howard: Over at the elementary school, where it is now. I think the tennis court's still there. Of course now tennis is popular. One tennis court in the mid-1950s-- now, for heaven's sakes, I guess they're crying for tennis courts. I think they've got four, five or six down at the school.

Nathan: It must have been a well-built court to last all this time.

Howard: It was a hard-top court. I don't know if they use it now or not. I don't know if it's still there.

But speaking of schools, that new addition, I just can't believe it.

Nathan: Yes, it's coming along fast, isn't it?

Howard: They talk about the Lower Cape being a community of retired people. It seems to me there are lots of children around.

Nathan: Yes, that's right. You realize that when the need for the school was so apparent and everybody voted for it. There wasn't any real dispute about it, was there?

Howard: No, no. We went to Town Meeting-- and how can you argue? If they need it, they need it.

Nathan: When the National Seashore came, did you have any feelings about that?

Howard: Oh, definitely. Marion and I, we were in favor of that from the start. And there was a lot of opposition to the National Seashore.

Nathan: Was there? Around here?

Howard: Yes, particularly among the local people, but I think the local people that are alive today would say-- that had originally opposed it would say, gee, I'm glad the Seashore's here. I have that feeling, because it certainly has helped the Town of Eastham. But we were always in favor of it. In fact, we never had any town zoning until I guess the mid-fifties. There was a lot of concern about zoning. People thought they were going to lose their freedom and so forth and so on, and perhaps we have lost some of our freedom, but the need for zoning is very apparent right now. Back then at one time some of the people wanted quarter acre lots, and Marion and I were much opposed to that. I thank God it didn't pass, but when I think back about the zoning, it hasn't changed all that much in all these years. Let's see-- ten, twenty, thirty? Over thirty years. Really hasn't changed that much.

Nathan: There are some proposed changes that are going to be coming up for a vote soon in town, at town meeting, but that's the first time in many years.

Howard: We were much in favor of the National Seashore. Ralph Chase was on the original [Seashore] Advisory Committee and he had a lot to do with the Seashore. He proposed that they take our oceanside beaches, which the Seashore did. There was some

concern about that, but the stipulation was that the residents of the town could go for free, which to this day they still can, if you can find a parking place.

Nathan: Of course they built one recently.

Howard: This parking lot across the street, yes.

Nathan: That must not make you very happy.

Howard: Oh, we don't mind at all. It's far enough away from our home. We don't hear it. And I don't think it's very close to anyone's home really. The most we ever hear is once in a while an occasional car door slam. Actually Marion and I like it, because it's such a short walk through the woods. We go over there just like the tourists. Walk over and jump on the bus and go to the beach.

But I think the Seashore has done a good job. They haven't stepped on very many toes really.

Speaking of trees, there was a lack of trees when I was growing up. Of course prior to that when my father was a small child, he said they could see Great Rock from his house, which would be where Ralph Chase lived. And my grandmother-- they'd go over there and play, my father and brothers and sisters would go to Great Rock and play, and his mother, my grandmother, could see them out the kitchen window. Can you imagine? The house is almost a mile away or three-quarters of a mile away in a straight

line. Wasn't a tree in sight. Just amazing. You'd never know it, walk around here today.

My father, by the way, he never finished high school.

Nathan: He was Truman?

Howard: Right. And he went to Harwich to school. From what I've gathered from listening to him talk, it was sort of an agricultural school, but he didn't go there very long. And he raised some chickens, his project, I guess, when he was going over there. You know how he got there? He walked to the North Eastham depot, jump the train, go to Harwich, and in the afternoon he'd take the train back. I guess the train came down at noon-time. Went off in the early morning and came back at noon-time and went back later at night again. Then he walked back up to take care of his chickens. And the chicken coop sat almost where the Senior Citizen Center sits today. Years later Ralph Chase used it for a garage. He kept a couple of his vehicles in there, that he'd store there, and that old building stood there for years and years and years. I think it only collapsed about twenty years ago. Finally just simply disintegrated. It collapsed.

On the old homestead, where Ralph lived, they used to take all the bottles across the street, up on the hill, and about twenty years ago I went up in the real old trash piles and dug up all these old bottles. Some of them were quite ancient. So I had a friend from Orleans, Francis Brown, and he came down, he

helped me dig up some bottles and he knew just the guy that would buy old bottles. So he found this gentleman. The fellow paid us, oh, I don't know, over two hundred dollars for all these old bottles. Well, of course we thought we'd made a killing. He probably sold those bottles and realized a profit of five thousand, I don't know, but we thought we were making a killing. Can you imagine this guy wants to buy all these old bottles?

Of course the Cape was sparsely populated in the early 1900s and in the 1920s and the 1930s. I think there were only about five hundred people in town when I was born in 1926. I'm guessing the population must be over four thousand now. Forty-two hundred or something like that?

Nathan: I think so, yes. And about twelve thousand in the summertime.

Howard: I'm sure. That's quite a lot of growth. You know we have pollution problems now and we have terrible problems with what to do with our trash and waste, and I suppose eventually we're going to have water problems and sewage problems. But the town was so sparsely populated then that people used to do with their trash whatever they felt like doing.

Nathan: They didn't have to take it to a dump?

Howard: Oh, no, no. They dumped the garbage out back and the bottles and everything else. Even the old cars they'd drive off

over the hill and into the fields or into the few woods that were around. Just let them disintegrate. If you know where to go today, you could walk across here in the woods and find the remains of several old cars, engine blocks and so forth and so on. But the town really grew after World War II.

Nathan: You were too young probably to remember much about Prohibition? Did you see any rum-running or hear anything about it?

Howard: No, I'm too young for that. I've heard about it. Just from what I've read, which you've probably read also. But I guess some of the locals made a little money on Prohibition. Bud Cummings, he's still alive, he likes to tell a few Prohibition stories.

Nathan: We haven't talked about your children much. Tell me their names and stories about them maybe.

Howard: Well, Kathy is our first-born. She was born in 1951 and she lives in Harwich. She went through the school system here, Eastham Elementary School. She missed my Uncle Otto Nickerson by one year. So we didn't have the same teacher for the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. And she went to high school, high school of course being up in Orleans still. When she was there, they had added on to the high school. They'd added on another wing, several wings and a big auditorium. The original high

school was fairly small. In fact the original high school is what you see from Route 28.

Sherry went to high school there also, grade school in Eastham. Kathy lives in West Harwich. She has two children, a seventeen-year-old and a three-and-a-half year old right now. Sherry's married to Ken Higgins and they have no children and they live on Brackett Road, a mile from us.

Nathan: Is she the waitress? Sherry?

Howard: Yes. Ken was married before and he has three children and they're grown. He has two girls and a boy. But they're grown up now, they're adults. Sherry and Ken were married, I should remember how many years ago. They've been married quite long. So we're happy that they live close by. They're Cape Codders too, for what it's worth. I'm not sure that being a Cape Coddier is worth anything any more. People are people, no matter where they're born or where they live.

I know a point of interest. My grandfather on my mother's side, he was stationmaster for the railroad in North Eastham, but he died in 1924 of a heart attack and I was born in 1926, so I never knew him.

Nathan: What was his name?

Howard: Gill. Howard Gill. I'm named after him. My mother was one of two children.

Nathan: What was her name?

Howard: Minnie. Minnie Gill. And there was Althea Gill, and my mother was married at a relatively young age to my father, and she died of cancer in 1963. My father just died a few years ago. He lived to be eighty-one. My aunt, she had diabetes, and she didn't live very long either. She only lived to be about sixty-two or sixty-three. My grandmother lived to be seventy-two. My grandmother on my mother's side lived to be seventy-two, but her mother lived to be ninety-seven.

So when Kathy was born, we had a five-generation picture. Kathy, Marion and myself, my mother and father being the third, my grandmother would be the fourth and her mother would be the fifth. A five generation picture.

Nathan: I can't think of anything else to ask you, Howard. If you've got anything else to say, that you might want to

Howard: Well, I can remember growing up, when we lived on the other side of town, on Great Pond. We used to live on Great Pond. We used that pond-- you wouldn't believe. We were young and naive and I suppose even today-- I may be a little stupid, but I saw no value in all that. And now people come down here and spend hundreds of thousands of dollars and sometimes millions of dollars for the same things we took for granted, thought they were always going to be there.

Nathan: You took it for granted. You didn't realize how lucky you were to have it, I guess. People who live in the city all their lives don't realize what this kind of life is until they get to it.

Howard: That's true. We didn't even have the summer visitors back in the thirties and forties that we have now. There were summer visitors, but we could even go down to the pond, there wasn't anybody there swimming. And that wasn't very many days. AMazing! We got our own boat.

Nathan: What kind of boat?

Howard: Just a rowboat, a skiff. And the Hayes boys, there were four brothers-- in fact, they still live in town. One of them's dead, but two of the Hayes live on Nauset Road at the north end and Bill Hayes lives right up here. You walk by his house every day. And Bob Hayes did live down Sunken Meadow Road, but they've sold and they spend most of their time in Florida now. And Tom is dead. He was killed. He worked for the Light Company. He was killed on a pole. But anyway, they were great friends of ours. They had a dory. Oh, that was nice. They just had a dory on the pond. We had a great time.

I can remember one thing though about the blackfish. They call them whales now, that they try so desperately to save. Back in the thirties, they used to drive the fish ashore.

Nathan: Really? Why?

Howard: They used their little fishing boats to drive them ashore so they could get the oil out of their heads. I'm not sure what they used the oil for. Lubrication? I don't really know. But the value of the mammal was in the oil in the head.

Nathan: Did they go ashore any time of their own accord?

Howard: I think they did, yes, but if they were around and the boats saw them, they'd try to drive them ashore. Then they'd harvest the oil. Of course they didn't have the equipment to bury them as rapidly as they do today. They'd deteriorate something awful. You could smell them all over town. It was pretty bad. But we were naive children then. We used to run down to see the blackfish, we called them, and we'd run and jump on one and run and jump on the other.

Nathan: You didn't care about the smell? It didn't bother you?

Howard: Well, this was before they started to smell. After they started, our mother and father would keep us away from there. But how naive we were. And how wrong we were, you know? But we didn't know any better. We saw all the people doing it and we thought it was right that they should drive them ashore. Didn't think anything about it.

You know, you were speaking of deer earlier, and you'd see deer sometimes, especially down in North Eastham. But I don't know but what today there are just as many deer around as there were then. We see them frequently right here in this area.

But I'm pleased to see the deer. I suppose they can over-populate an area. But if it weren't for the dogs and the hunters, but especially the dogs, they'd move right in the house with you. I'm sure of that. They would. They'd become very friendly.

I can remember, we went to a wedding out in Rochester, New York about four years ago, three years ago, and this is suburban Rochester, New York. The deer are walking around everywhere, in front of the houses and the back yards. Some of the people were even feeding them. I said to Marion, look, here's a suburban town, the deer are walking around.

Nathan: I've read about that kind of thing.

Howard: Let's see if there's anything more of interest I could say about Nauset Road or Schoolhouse Road. I guess I've said about everything I can think of now.

Of course the trains used to be when I was a small boy, the trains used to go back and forth all the time. They discontinued the passenger service, the regular passenger service, probably just about 1931 or '32, somewhere in there. And then occasionally they'd send a train down and I can remember-- it must have been '33 or '34-- they'd send down the

Zephyr. I suppose that was a publicity stunt or something. We'd hear the thing coming, because it had a different whistle, you know.

By the way, when there was a lack of trees around, you could hear the whistle of a train for miles. You could hear it in Brewster from Eastham. And we'd rush over to the tracks to see the Zephyr go by. It didn't go by very fast, because even in the thirties the tracks weren't very good.

Nathan: I'm surprised you can hear the surf here. From our bedroom you can hear it at night.

Howard: Oh, some days in the winter very well indeed. I enjoyed my childhood here and I think our children enjoyed their childhood living in Eastham. I suppose if you're a child, any time's a good time.

Nathan: It certainly should be, but sometimes it isn't.

TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

Howard: I want to tell you about my father when he was a young man. After he went to school in Harwich for a few months and raised his chickens, then he went to work as a cook on a submarine tender down in Provincetown. He was a teenager then. He always told me that he liked the work and he was always a good cook. He never cooked while my mother was alive, but after she

died, he could really whip himself up some good meals. He was a great cook.

Anyway, after that job he became an automobile salesman in the early twenties and he made very good money at that. He made a far lot more money than he ever made from Depression times on. But even during the Depression we always ate very well. I can remember that he'd figure out a way for us to eat. He'd scratch quahogs and dig clams and get scallops and go fishing. We even had a cow once. We had so much milk, I don't think we knew what to do with it. We couldn't drink it all. And we had chickens, by the way. I can remember the chickens because he always had me clean out the chicken house, and I didn't like that chore. Some dusty!

Nathan: Did your brother help you?

Howard: My brother is two and a half years younger, but he helped. He helped, but being the older brother, I did more work than he did. My brother, he's done very well. He enlisted in the Air Force, but he didn't enlist until right after the war was over. He was in the Air Force and he got out of the Air Force and he went to aeronautical school. From there he became a mechanic for American Airlines and he was a mechanic for years and years and years and he still works for American Airlines to this day. He probably has forty years plus service for the airlines, and although he isn't a mechanic any more, he's a supervisor now.

Nathan: Where does he live?

Howard: He lives in Harbor City, California, which is not too far from Los Angeles. Down near Long Beach. We've been out there and he has a nice home there. It's not a bad area, except it's crowded. There are millions of people around, but it's not a bad area. He's worked all those years for American Airlines. He's worked in Boston for them. He's worked in Chicago. He's worked in San Diego. And he worked in L.A. Still to this day he works in L.A. Of all the cities he liked San Diego best. I don't know why he came back to L.A., but I think in his heart he really wishes he was in San Diego.

But he got married. He doesn't have any children. He didn't get married till he was forty-eight years old for the first time, but he's been married now about a dozen years. I think he's going to retire also.

Nathan: Do you think he'll come here or do you think he'll stay out there?

Howard: I don't think so. He doesn't have well, he likes Cape Cod, there isn't any doubt about that. I don't know whether I love Cape Cod or I'm just an old stick in-the-mud, but whereas he could leave, I couldn't.

END OF TAPE

BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

Mr and Mrs Ralph Chase -- Ralph and Toku-- were invited for dinner on Nov 19, at the home of Mr and Mrs Howard Brewer. Nothing surprising in a birthday dinner invitation by friends and neighbors, Marion and Howard, and their daughter Kathy! Shortly after dinner a friend dropped in, followed by others, until there were twenty friends and relatives to help Ralph celebrate his eight-fifth birthday. Among the guests were Mrs Mabel Chase, Ralph's sister-in-law, and Ott Nickerson, the husband of Ralph's step-sister, Bin Nickerson. The youngest guest was Shaun Edward-- young son of the former Kathy Brewer.

Mr Chase was born in the John Ryder House on Samoset Road, opposite to the Town Mill Green. Newcomers to Eastham remember that the house was later lived in by Mr and Mrs West. Several years of Ralph's boyhood and young manhood were spent in a house no longer standing, on Orchard Road.

Ralph has traveled widely, to Britain, Europe and Japan. He was in the U.S. Army in World War I. He has held many appointive and elective offices in Eastham, serving as Selectman, and Chairman of Selectmen, for several years. Through the years matrimony was not one of Ralph's chosen ways of life until on an April day, almost four years ago now, he married Toku Nakamura of Osaka, Japan, whom he had met on one of his trips to the Orient.

The first issues of The Cape Codder, founded in 1946, have Ralph's advertisement for his insurance and real estate business--one of the very first advertisers. The ad was the only one for real estate in those nostalgically quiet days. The many friends of Toku and Ralph Chase wish them well for years to come.